

# AVOIDANCE REGISTERS AND LANGUAGE CONTACT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

CALL 2020

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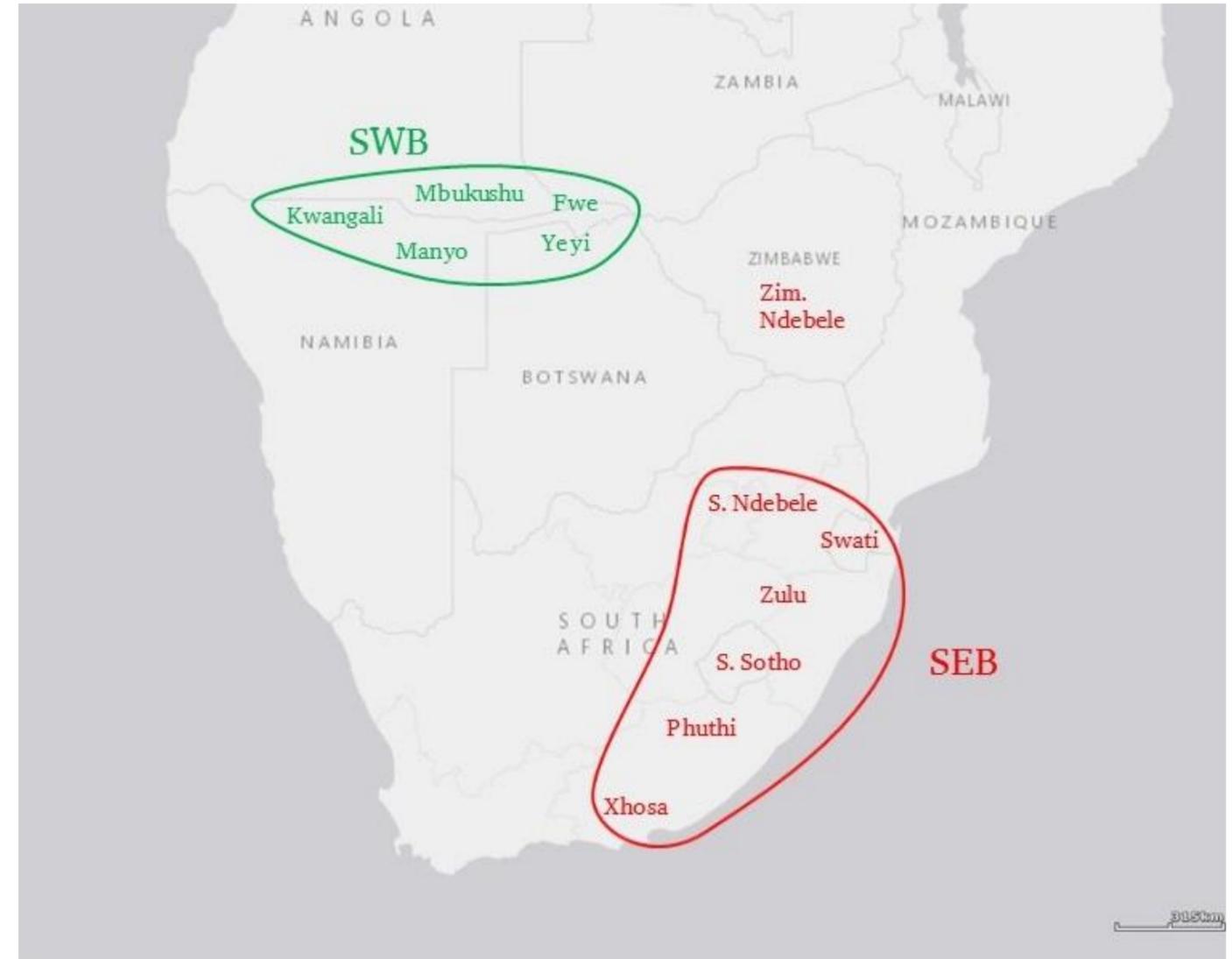
# OVERVIEW

- Clicks & avoidance registers
  - Re-evaluating the role of hlonipha
    - Click insertion in hlonipha
    - Other African avoidance registers
    - Other Bantu click languages
- Other explanations
  - Isikhwetha: the secret register of initiates
  - Sound symbolism and ideophones

# CLICKS & AVOIDANCE REGISTERS

# CLICKS IN BANTU LANGUAGES

- Clicks are crosslinguistically rare
- No clicks in Bantu languages outside Southern Africa
- Clicks are abundant in Khoisan languages in Southern Africa
- > Clicks are clearly the result of Khoisan contact



# CLICKS IN BANTU LANGUAGES

In borrowings

- Nguni **i-!a!a** ‘polecat’ < ꞤUngkue **!kx'a!kx'a** ‘weasel’
- Nguni **i-llhegu** ‘old man’ < llXegwi **llkxexo** ‘old man’
- Nguni **nglwaba** ‘bury’ < N|uu **ŋloβa** ‘bury’

In native words

- Nguni **lim-a** ‘extinguish’ < Proto-Bantu **\*dím** ‘be extinguished’
- Nguni **!al-a** ‘start’ < Proto-Bantu **\*bád** ‘begin’
- Nguni **l<sup>h</sup>it<sup>h</sup>-a** ‘spill’ < Proto-Bantu **\*jìt** ‘pour’

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Click insertion not phonologically but sociolinguistically motivated

# HLONIPHA

*Isihlonipho sabafazi*: women's language of respect

- practiced by Nguni and Southern Sotho communities
- married women avoid the names of their in-laws and words with the same syllables
  - example:  
father-in-law **Saki**  
avoid **usana** 'baby', **usapho** 'family', **ibhekile** 'tin can'
  - example:  
father-in-law **Dike**  
avoid **idikazi** 'unmarried woman', **isikere** 'scissors'

# HLONIPHA

- alternative lexemes are created in different ways
  - semantic shift:  
**ukwazi** ‘know’ > hlonipha **ukuyila** ‘plan, plot’
  - derivation:  
**ingubo** ‘blanket’ > hlonipha **intyatho** < **tyatha** ‘carry over the shoulder’
  - borrowing:  
**imbiza** ‘pot’ > hlonipha **impotwe** ‘pot’ < English
  - phoneme deletion:  
**umkhono** ‘arm’ > hlonipha **um’ono**
  - phoneme replacement:  
**izolo** ‘yesterday’ > hlonipha **iyolo**

# HLONIPHA

Phoneme replacement:

- **izolo** ‘yesterday’ > hlonipha **iyolo**
- **intombi** ‘girl’ > hlonipha **inzombi**
- **itamla** ‘axe’ > hlonipha **in!amla**
- **ityala** ‘case’ > hlonipha **ilala**

Hlonipha-motivated phoneme replacement may have led to click insertion in previously clickless words (Werner 1905, Herbert 1990, Irvine & Gal 2000)

# RE-EVALUATING HLONIPHA

Did hlonipha lead to the insertion of clicks in native Bantu words?

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes?
2. Do other avoidance registers also make use of phoneme replacement?
3. Do all Bantu click languages practice *hlonipha*?

# CLICK INSERTION IN HOLONIPHA

# HLONIPHA CORPUS

Xhosa: 966 hlonipha substitutes for 498 Xhosa words

The Greater Xhosa Dictionary (1989-2006)	264 hlonipha substitutes
Robert Godfrey (lexicographer, 1909-1934)	172 hlonipha substitutes
Tessa Dowling (Xhosa-speaking linguist, 1988)	350 hlonipha substitutes
Godfrey Mzamane (Xhosa linguist, 1962)	72 hlonipha substitutes
Rosalie Finlayson (Xhosa-speaking linguist, 1978-1984)	230 hlonipha substitutes

Zulu: 1166 hlonipha substitutes for 805 Zulu words

Zulu-English Dictionary, Doke & Vilakazi 1972

# HLONIPHA CORPUS

Big fat caveat on data: it is mostly unclear how & where data were collected

- Doke & Vilakazi (1972: VII): “a **representative collection** of the **better-known** hlonipha terms, used by the women”

Doke & Vilakazi (1972: XIII): “Our collection of hlonipha terms was greatly enriched by **long lists sent in by Mr. K. O. K. Mnguni.**”

- Greater Xhosa Dictionary: “Circumstances did not permit of the collection and recording of this hlonipha vocabulary, but a few **commonly used words** furnished by members of the staff have been included in this dictionary.”

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes?

Xhosa:

- phoneme replacement accounts for 75 out of 966 hlonipha substitutes
  - click insertion accounts for 9 out of 75 cases of phoneme replacement
  - click loss accounts for 17 out of 75 cases of phoneme replacement
- productive phoneme replacement strategies
  - inserting a palatal consonant /ty, dy, ny, y/ (Finlayson 1978, 1982)
  - “there seems to be an avoidance of the use of click consonants in the coining of new words in the hlonipha vocabulary” (Finlayson 1982: 49)

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes?

Zulu:

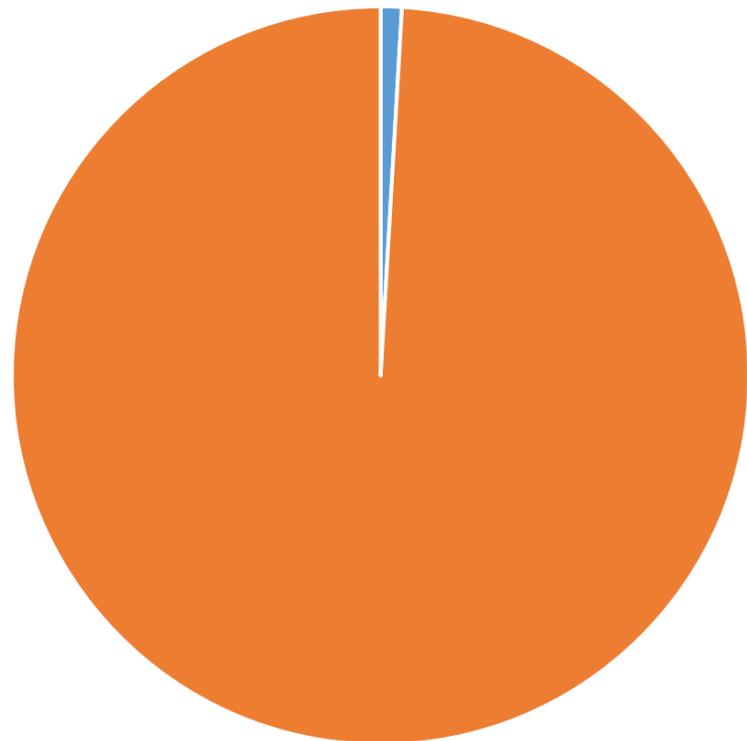
- phoneme replacement accounts for 393 out of 1166 hlonipha substitutes
  - click insertion accounts for 176 out of 393 cases of phoneme replacement
  - click loss accounts for 26 out of 393 cases of phoneme replacement
- productive phoneme replacement strategies
  - “the dental click [...] is a popular hlonipha sound” (Van Rooyen 1968: 38)

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

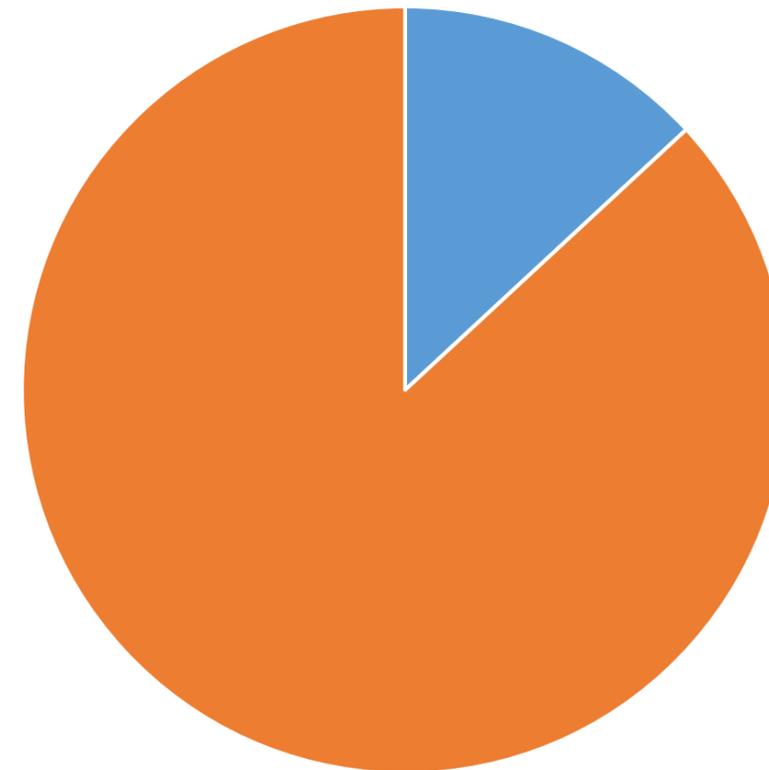
Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes?

Xhosa: NO, Zulu: YES (sort of)

Percentage of Xhosa hlonipha substitutes created by click insertion



Percentage of Zulu hlonipha substitutes created by click insertion

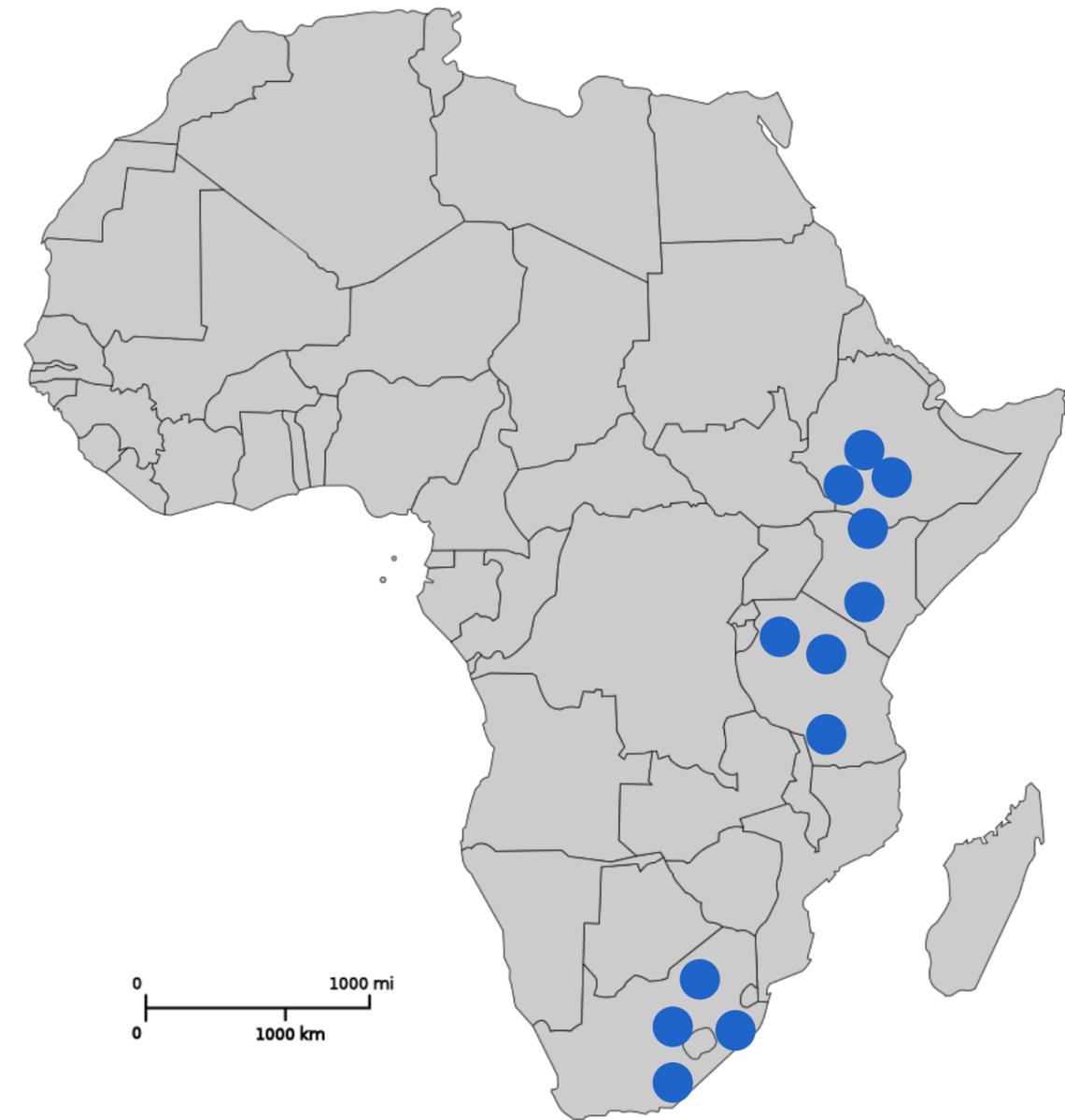


# OTHER IN-LAW AVOIDANCE REGISTERS

# AVOIDANCE REGISTERS

## In-law avoidance registers in Africa

- Ethiopia: Kambaata, Sidaama, Hadiyya, Oromo (Cushitic)
- Kenya/Tanzania: Kerewe, Kamba, Nyakyusa (Bantu), Datooga (Nilotic)
- South Africa: Xhosa, Zulu, S. Sotho, Ndebele (Bantu)



# AVOIDANCE REGISTERS

Similarities with *hlonipha*:

- physical as well as linguistic avoidance
- avoidance is based on formal properties
- avoidance strategies include derivation, semantic shift, borrowing
- BUT: phoneme replacement is rare
  - unattested in Kambaata (Treis 2005), Nyakyusa (Kolbusa 2000), Southern Sotho (Kunene 1958)
  - accounts for only 5% of avoidance lexicon in Datooga (Mitchell 2015)
  - occurs in Oromo, Sidamo, but only includes native phonemes (Mbaya 2002, Teferra 1987)

# OTHER BANTU CLICK LANGUAGES

# CLICKS IN BANTU LANGUAGES

South-West Bantu click languages:

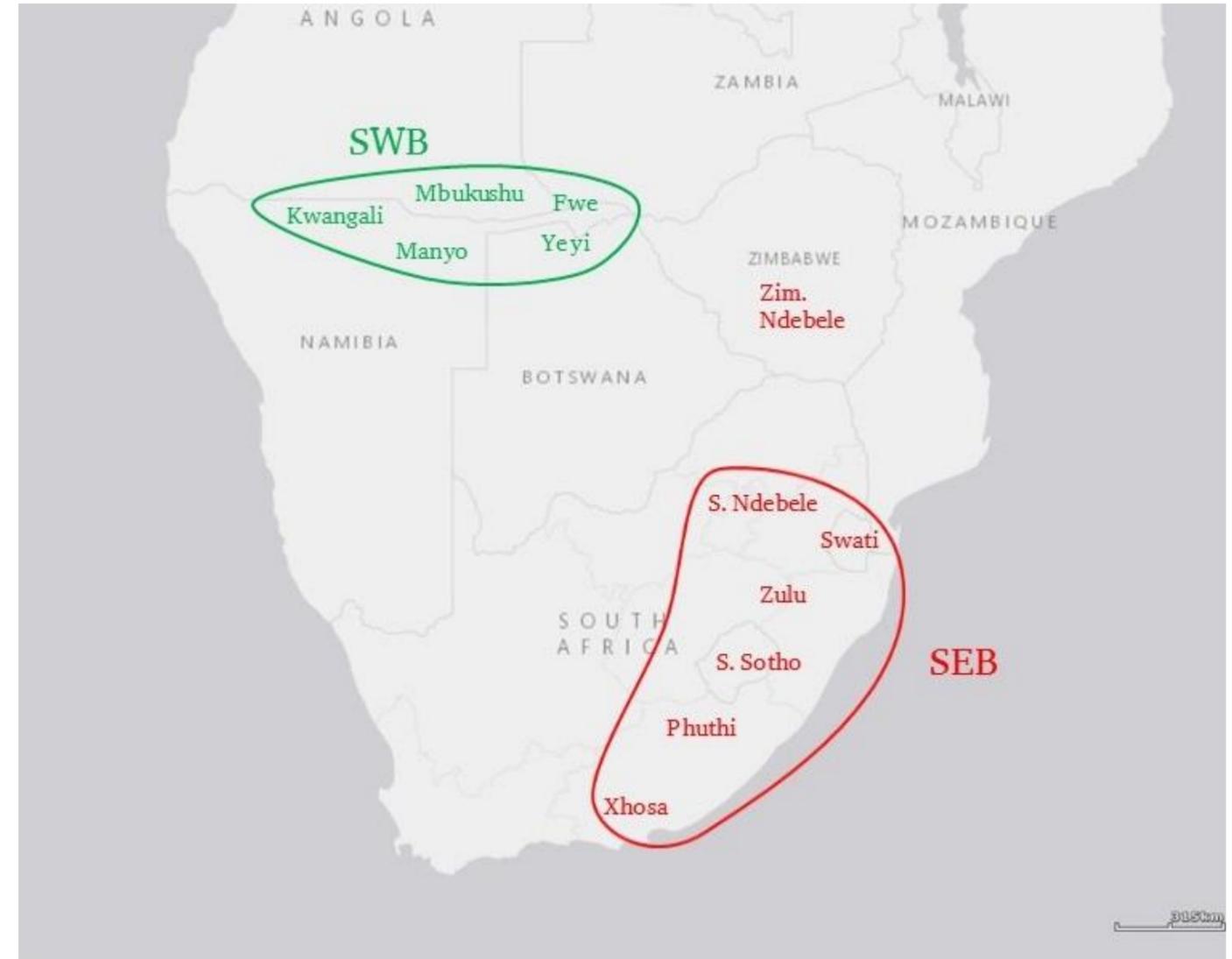
Kwangali, Mbukushu, Manyo, Fwe, Yeyi

– no hlonipha or similar avoidance practices

– clicks occur in native vocabulary

Fwe **g|ónt-a** ‘drip’ < Proto-Bantu **\*ton**  
/ **\*tont** ‘drip’

Yeyi **u-n!oko** ‘leftovers of porridge  
stuck in a pot’ < Proto-Bantu **\*kókó**  
‘crust’



# SUMMARY

## Re-evaluating hlonipha

1. Click insertion is not a common strategy in the attested hlonipha vocabulary
2. In-law avoidance registers in other African languages are very similar to hlonipha, but phoneme replacement is rare & never involves foreign phonemes
3. Clicks also occur in Bantu languages without hlonipha  
Even in these languages, clicks are inserted in native lexemes

# OTHER EXPLANATIONS

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# IF NOT HLONIPHA, WHAT?

Possible other explanations for click insertion in Nguni languages

1. Isikhwetha: secret lexicon of male initiates
2. Sound symbolism & ideophones

# ISIKHWETHA

- Isikhwetha: secret lexicon used by initiated Xhosa men (abakhwetha)
  - Learned during initiation
  - Scarce data suggest that the same linguistic processes play a role as in hlonipha:
    - 50% of the isikhwetha vocabulary of one initiate consisted of click words (Finlayson 1998: 113)
- Xhosa **inyamazane** ‘antelope’ > isikhwetha **inlamazane**

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

- Sound symbolism is described as motivation for click insertion in South-West Bantu click languages (Bostoen & Sands 2012, Gunnink et al 2015)
  - Fwe **g|ónt-a** ‘drip’ < Proto-Bantu **\*-ton-** / **\*-tont-** ‘drip’
  - Fwe **n|umpwí** ‘ideophone of falling in water’, **n|úmpwama** ‘to fall in water’
  - Mbukushu **n|ɛrɛ** ‘sound made by a bean when thrown in an empty pot’
  - Manyo **lûka** ‘explode (with a cracking noise), bang’

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

Clicks also play a role in ideophones & sound symbolism in Nguni

- 30% of Xhosa ideophones contain a click, vs. 17% of the general lexicon (Andrason 2017)
- 30% of Zulu ideophones contain a click, vs. 14% of the general lexicon
- “The substitution of clicks for other sounds [...] are clearly products either of the Nguni custom of uku-hlonipha or, more frequently and more importantly, of ‘free creativity’, especially in the development of ideophones which seems to be how many of the medial (and other) click forms originate.” (Argyle 1986: 33)
  - **phece** ‘ideophone of bending’, **pheca** ‘bend’ < \***pet** ‘bend’
  - **monqo** ‘ideophone of snapping’, **monquka** ‘snap’ < \***monyuk** ‘be broken off’

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

Sound symbolically motivated click insertion occurs in Khoisan:

- !Xam (Tuu, Khoisan): click insertion in the speech of animals & the moon
  - Moon, hare & anteater replace all clicks with retroflex clicks
  - Jackal replaces all consonants with labial clicks
  - Ostrich replaces clicks with /t/ because “*The Ostrich’s tongue is not long, for it is round, it is bone. It does not resemble the tongues of other things which are long, for the Ostrich’s tongue is round. Therefore the Ostrich does not click.*” (Story quoted in Bleek 1936: 164)

# CONCLUSIONS

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Factors that have contributed to the incorporation and insertion of clicks in Bantu languages

- hlonipha
- isikhwetha
- sound symbolism and ideophones
  - clicks clearly feel at home in expressive vocabulary
  - expressive use of click & other consonant substitution also occurs in Khoisan

